

ENGAGEMENT: U.S. STRATEGIC REQUIREMENTS IN FAILING, FAILED, AND COLLAPSED STATES

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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COLLAPSED STATES**

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ABSTRACT

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In today's emerging multi - polar world the relative stability of the tense Cold War bi - polarity has been lifted from many smaller countries that were U.S. or Soviet pawns during that period. Many of these countries have become failing, failed, or collapsed states. In order for the U.S. to remain a super power, it must successfully be able to engage these countries when a national interest is at stake. The difference between a failing and failed state is largely the degree of severity of the problems that cause such conditions, it is much more efficient and less expensive in terms of blood and treasure to engage before a state has failed. This Strategy Research Project examines the history and causes of these failing, failed and collapsed states. Using brief case studies, it provide some examples for engagement or non – engagement.

ENGAGEMENT: U.S. STRATEGIC REQUIREMENTS IN FAILING, FAILED, AND COLLAPSED STATES

“By 2025, the international system will be multi-polar in nature with gaps in national power continuing to narrow between developed and developing countries. Concurrent with this ‘leveling’ of power among nation-states, the relative power of various non-state actors – including businesses, tribes, religious organizations, and criminal networks – will be increasing.”¹ Indeed, multi-polarity is already evident in the rise of regional powers such as Brazil, India and China (BRIC’s) and the reemergence of Russia as well.² These countries will compete with the US both for ‘market shares’ in the global market place and for the natural resources necessary to fuel their economic engines. The stability of the countries possessing these natural resources – as well as countries that are located astride geographic areas critical to the transportation of these resources – is essential for the smooth flow of these resources and products throughout the global economy.

In the post - 9/11 world, the global flow of resources and products has become even more complex. Many of the countries with valuable natural resources or those located in geographically strategic areas are known to be unfriendly to U.S. interests – and those of our allies – some of them are seeking capabilities that could cause unacceptable harm either to the U.S. directly or its interests. Additionally, hostile groups that are safely nested in countries could precipitate an event with unacceptable consequences for U.S. or global security. Such threats could very well emanate from a failing, failed or collapsed state. A failing state is unable to completely control events

within its borders, but can nonetheless provide public services to the majority of its people and retain some threshold level of political legitimacy.

In a failed state, any semblance of government control or influence has disappeared – normal and expected government functions are not performed.³ Failed states are characterized by deteriorating or destroyed infrastructure; while they may have a sitting government, it will have ceased to provide security for the population and often engages in ruler-led oppression. As government influence weakens, criminal violence increases.⁴ The difference between a failing and failed state is often barely discernable. As a state nears the “tipping point” in the transition from failing to failed, the difference between the two is largely one of degrees of severity of problems.

Then there are collapsed states. A collapsed state is an extreme version of a failed state. It is characterized by a completely ineffective government – if in fact there is a government at all. There is complete absence of any sort of entity that is focused on the common good of the people within the borders of what once was a recognizable state. As Rotberg notes; “It is a mere geographical expression, a black hole into which a failed polity has fallen. There is a dark energy, but the forces of entropy have overwhelmed the radiance that hitherto provided some semblance of order and other vital political goods to the inhabitants (no longer citizens).”⁵ A fourth category would include states that are weak or developing. These states might not be on the path to ruin, but they are susceptible to outside influences that might be detrimental to their fragile stability.

As competition for natural resources becomes keener, the U.S must be able to compete in this complex and uncertain environment. Assuming that the U.S. does not

want to rely exclusively upon the military instrument of power every time it seeks a suitable outcome to a problem in a failing, failed or collapsed state, the U.S. must be able to engage nations early in a way that resolves disputes equitably and in a fashion that lays the groundwork for positive future relations. This SRP examines the history and causes of these failing, failed and collapsed states. Using brief case studies, it shows how timely and effective engagement with such problematic states can strategically support U.S. national interests.

Failing and failed states have many things in common, and the severity of their problems largely distinguishes the failing from the failed. The most recognized and accepted causal factors for their condition include:

Distrust of government damages its effectiveness and weakens institutional legitimacy and popular cooperation with government programs and agents.

Economic breakdown fuels conflict over resources; anger over inequality, distrust of government, factional strife, and the appeal of insurgents and extremists.

Government fragility or corruption can weaken or pervert control of security forces, which may turn to marauding, death squads or ethnic conflict.

Violence disrupts farming, commerce, and foreign aid; diverts human resources; devours money; destroys physical infrastructure; and distracts government.⁶

Arguably, the last two causal factors are the most damaging to the people's confidence in the ability of the government to protect their life and property.

As these various issues fester and their degree of severity increases over time, the population turns more toward individual and group survival rather than those collective tasks required for national recovery and societal stability.⁷

The Perspective of History

The failure of states is nothing new in the history of civilization. It is estimated that the vast majority of states formed in Europe after 1500 have failed.⁸ The period of empire - building during the colonial period was rationalized on the assumption that states provided the only acceptable order and that all of the world's peoples and territory must fall under the control of a designated state. As a result, colonial powers created states where they did not exist. These states were established in the European tradition; they incorporated peoples who fell within their boundaries, which were often arbitrarily determined. This process often destroyed existing tribal organizations or forms of previous political organization.⁹ In colonial Africa, the European powers' national boundaries for countries were based upon the simple expedient of efficient occupation and administration, which were based on European – not African – considerations. Not surprisingly, these boundaries included many diverse ethnic groups and divided others with newly established borders. Within these borders, the colonial masters introduced Western concepts and practices such as formal employment, health care, and education. However, indigenous peoples' uneven access to these "benefits" often resulted in violent confrontations. This, in turn, gave the Europeans the pretext and legitimacy necessary to impose colonial order.¹⁰

The twentieth century saw the collapse of a system of empire established over the previous 300 years. Within this system the Austro-Hungarian, Belgian, British, Danish, Dutch, Ethiopian, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Ottoman, Portuguese, Russian, Soviet and Spanish empires played significant roles at various times. At the end of WW II, previous world powers such as Great Britain and France, who had been severely weakened by the war, relinquished their empires over the next 25 years. As

post - war decolonization proceeded, the number of globally recognized countries grew from approximately 50 to today's 192.¹¹ During this post - war decolonization, former major powers such as France and England gradually aligned their vital national interests with those of the U.S. In this way they gained a sort of "international economy of scale" that enabled them to maintain their global influence in the shadow of the larger U.S. – USSR Cold War. As new nation states emerged during this period of decolonization, the onset of the Cold War and the competition between the U.S. and Soviet Union provided for continued stability in these newly independent countries.

One school of thought suggests that the colonial period did not end after World War II due to a growth in effective nationalism within the ruled states. Rather, it ended because the empire countries were not willing – or able – to sustain the economic and societal burden of maintaining their colonies. Instead, they realized that access to the raw materials possessed by their previous dominions was much cheaper and easier to sustain by fostering bilateral relationships with these countries.¹² Many of these relationships and their concomitant influence in these countries and regions persist today. Consider, for example, French influence in its former African colonies.

The competition not only for resources but also for geographic position on the globe in the capitalist - communist ideological struggle led both the U.S. and Soviet Union to expend significant resources and capital in these often corrupt and underdeveloped countries. As long as a given country remained friendly to its superpower sponsor, the support continued to flow. Often, if the government began to show signs of changing its allegiances to the other side, this potential realignment would be met by forceful repression or a covert replacement of the government. Rarely, a

country would change its superpower allegiance. But when it did, its new superpower partner would assure its stability – of course, under a new ideological regime. In effect, this bipolarity sustained smaller nations' stability.

When the Cold War competition between the U.S. and USSR ended, both countries, partly in response to budgetary pressures, significantly reduced their engagement in developing countries by withdrawing economic and military support for proxy governments. This situation was similar to the end of the colonial period. The removal of the colonial and Cold War structures, and the ensuing vacuum in governance and stability, accounts for many of the problems of current failing or failed states. Combined with the international community's continued maintenance of European drawn colonial borders, the post - Cold War neglect eventually led to many of these new states eventually becoming failing, failed, or even collapsed states. Countries once democratic and friendly to US interests have become weaker; some have fallen prey to forces and individuals with different agendas. In many such countries, violence has erupted, supported and enabled in no small part by the countless weapons left by the U.S. and USSR following the Cold War.

By 2025, the world is predicted to be “more ramshackle than orderly, its composition hybrid and heterogeneous as befits a transition that will still be a work in progress.” The rise of China and India – and to a lesser extent Russia and Brazil – will have significantly narrowed the U.S. lead in economic and global influence now enjoyed by the U.S.¹³ Unlike Great Britain and France following WW II however, the U.S. today – and for the foreseeable future – has no ideologically aligned “rising” nation with whom

to partner and eventually cede global leadership. The only viable option available to the U.S. is to remain a superpower.

The U.S. status as the world's sole superpower does not equate to hegemony – or omnipotence on the global stage. While it is true that the U.S. has no military or economic peer, the alliances, informal coalitions, and international organizations to which the U.S. is a party can and often do force compromise of the U.S. position on critical issues. But the imperative to retain its superpower position in the world mandates that the U.S. stay engaged with other nations in order to maintain some influence with their governments and access to strategic resources vital to U.S. national security. Furthermore, non - military U.S. engagement in international affairs has not been seen historically as unilateral or hegemonic, but rather as a norm. So the U.S. has provided both a calming and stabilizing influence in global security affairs. Thus, U.S. engagement has led to genuine international stability, welcomed by developed nations. U.S. power and influence has facilitated free trade and other interactions that advance other nations' interests and enhance prosperity at home and abroad.

Countries routinely interact on a myriad of levels. Consequently, U.S. foreign policy should be viewed as a continuum ranging from peacetime engagement with our allies through major combat operations or, as Clausewitz describes, "The continuation of politics through other means."¹⁴ Accordingly, U.S. leaders ideally employ the instruments of national power (Diplomatic, Information, Military and Economic – DIME) in an integrated and synchronized manner to influence and shape outcomes advantageous to U.S. national interests.

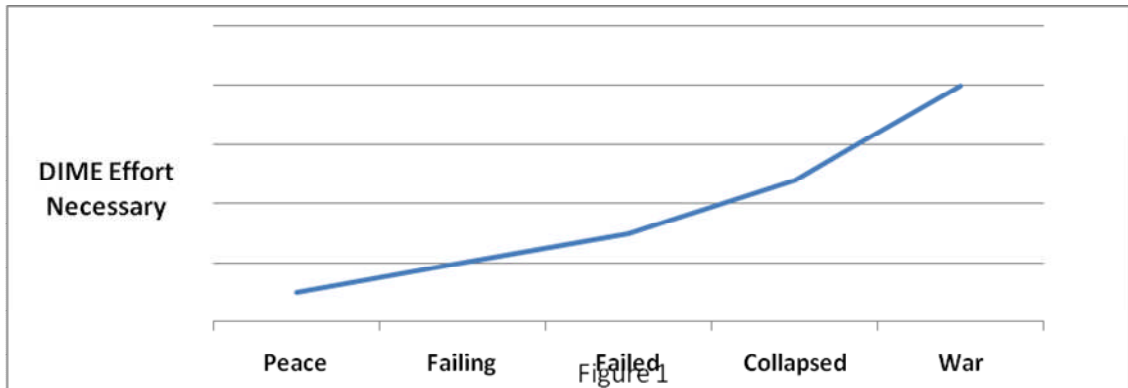


Figure 1:

Employment of the instruments of power to accomplish this purpose is not linear. For example, the *military* instrument can be used either in a direct combat role or as an integrated component of a broader peaceful interagency and intergovernmental strategy that focuses on capacity building or humanitarian development and relief efforts. Some or all of the instruments of power are being used across the spectrum of U.S. relationships with countries ranging from Australia and Great Britain on one side – key allies with well developed governments and capacities – to Zimbabwe and Iran – who represent either failing states or adversaries. U.S. agencies involved within the course and scope of their work with another nation need to develop an understanding of culture, society, national actors, issues and the connections among all states and non-state actors on the spectrum from ally to adversary. This type of understanding provides the insights necessary to execute a “whole of government approach”. It is this approach which provides decision makers with the most comprehensive information necessary for making informed decisions regarding aiding a failing state, getting involved in a failed or collapsed state or going to war with an adversary.

The Case for Engagement and if so How?

The Fund for Peace's Failed State Index 2008 lists their top 60 failing and failed states in descending order of criticality. Among these 60 states, 27 are in Africa – including 12 of the top 20 and 4 of the top 5.¹⁵ As stated earlier, states have been failing for hundreds of years. So we may be entering a period of increased large scale dissolution of recognized states, or we may be witnessing the dissolution of the Cold War based bi-polar world. Many argue that the question for the U.S. is whether we as a nation – and leader of the world community – should intervene prior to state failure of collapse – or “let nature take its course.” When intervening in the internal affairs of other states, the amount of effort, blood, and treasure committed should be commensurate with the national interests at issue. If the U.S. intervenes and American lives are lost, the intervention must be justified in the “court of U.S. public opinion.” For this reason, as a country's situation dramatically deteriorates, decision - makers must carefully assess any planned U.S. involvement, especially the plan and its end-state.

In a perfect world, the involvement of and aid provided by the U.S. government would prevent a state from crossing that threshold from a failing state to a failed or collapsed state. Further, engagement with nations that are stable or developing but not vulnerable to failure can enhance U.S. influence in that country – and even in that region. National Security Presidential Directive/NSPD – 44, *Management of Interagency Efforts Concerning Reconstruction and Stabilization*, designates the Department of State (DOS) as the lead government agency for such efforts. There are many functions and tasks associated with identifying and engaging nations before they fail or collapse. Among them are:

(1) Develop and approve strategies with respect to U.S. foreign assistance and foreign economic cooperation, for ...stabilization activities directed towards foreign states and regions at risk of...conflict or civil strife. (2) Coordinate interagency processes to identify states at risk of instability, lead interagency planning to prevent or mitigate conflict...(3) Coordinate reconstruction and stabilization activities and preventative strategies with foreign countries, international and regional organizations...¹⁶

There are numerous instruments available for this type of proactive engagement with other nations. However, if one believes that power is a zero sum game, then the government must decide on which nations the expenditure of U.S. treasure is worth the benefit gained from U.S. aid and other involvement. Once an engagement strategy is decided upon, it must be executed holistically utilizing all elements of the DIME in an integrated and synchronized manner and in the context of the continuum depicted in figure 1. Also, it must be regarded of as a long-term effort, meaning the U.S. will remain appropriately committed until objectives are met – and quite possibly beyond.

National Interests Make the Case

As an example, let's examine the Chavez regime in Venezuela. He took office in February 1999 after winning a democratic election by a landslide. Since an unsuccessful military coup to oust him in 2002 – which he accuses the U.S of aiding – he has pursued a regional strategy based on nationalistic and anti-American policies. As part of his strategy of isolating the U.S. in Latin America, he has convinced Ecuador to refuse renewal of the U.S. lease on bases used in our regional anti-drug effort. As Ecuador's Security Minister stated, "The U.S. stopped being the bench mark of what is good for Latin America, because Latin America did everything that the U.S. asked it to do and wasn't able to get out of poverty, the North American myth lost political weight."¹⁷

Because of the socio-economic issues of widespread social exclusion and poverty, the Latin American region is fertile ground for Chavez's anti-U.S. policies.

Prior to implementing a policy that responds to the challenge posed by Chavez, the U.S. government should decide what it desires to achieve. If our objectives are to maintain access to Venezuelan oil and U.S influence in the Americas, and to mitigate – or reverse – the effects of Chavez's anti-U.S. rhetoric and policies, then we must formulate an engagement strategy based on a “whole of government” approach that is fully integrated with a broader regional – and even hemispheric – strategy. To be effective, such an approach to engagement must not only incorporate a properly balanced mix of the instruments of power but also be proactive and long - term as well. This means that a credible engagement strategy cannot be based on engagement only when things are “going wrong;” we must also engage early when things are “going right” and when there is not a direct or immediate threat to U.S. interests. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) 2009 Budget Justification states that eighty percent of peoples in Latin America and the Caribbean live in abject poverty.¹⁸ Also, eight regional countries have compacts with the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) – to include Columbia and Bolivia, which are also listed as failing states.^{19 20} Beyond the *diplomatic* and *economic* elements of power which have already been implemented by means of the USAID and MCC, the next significant measure would be to craft an effective *information* policy that would package and publicize the U.S. aid engagement. This information policy needs to go beyond the use of USAID or DOS websites. Insofar as it is not culturally offensive or counterproductive to U.S. objectives, the U.S. policy should be “advertised” in the countries being aided as well as

throughout the broader region. This is where a culturally astute understanding of the country and region by those who have been working there and a holistic, integrated DOS - led engagement comes into play. This information also needs to be made available to people in the U.S. as well as the rest of the world. For example, full - page advertisements in U.S. newspapers could explain ongoing efforts and cite evidence of progress. Success stories go a long way towards other nations desiring U.S. presence in their area and downplaying or correcting misplaced imperialistic and hegemonic suspicions on the part of others.

A second case study for renewed U.S. engagement in Latin America might be a strategic transformation of our relationship with Cuba. Cuba is a close ally of Venezuela. Additionally, Russia has recently made both economic as well as military overtures towards Cuba to revive the leverage Cuba provided in their previous Cold War relationship. Any transformational strategy towards Cuba would have to be crafted with objectives that make clear to the Latin American region that the U.S. is seeking to strengthen hemispheric security and stability through the rebuilding of the relationship between the U.S. and the Cuban people in a way that enhances their prosperity and way of life. Additionally, this strategy should sufficiently manage expectations by informing the Cuban and American people that such a transformational engagement strategy would play out over a period of years – perhaps even a decade. Such a strategy could begin with simple diplomatic discourse that may lead to a simple first step, such as a limited number of direct commercial flights between the U.S. and Cuba. Also, it may inform the Cuban people and government that building relations with the U.S. promises greater long - term benefits for their country than enhanced ties with

Venezuela or Russia. A properly crafted policy and supporting strategy would arguably lead the Cubans to this realization. The next step might involve something altruistic, like medical assistance to help reduce Cuba's already very low HIV/AIDS rate, which is 0.1%.²¹

This approach would be most effective if developed as part of a broader public strategy that focused first on improving the condition of those 80% stuck in the abject poverty cited in the USAID budget request. As this policy was implemented over the course of several years, Chavez and his allies that were not the beneficiaries of new U.S. assistance would inevitably find themselves surrounded by countries much more friendly to the U.S. and therefore less influenced by Chavez's anti - Americanism. As there is no power that can currently counter the U.S. military, the optimal U.S. foreign policy might be as one observer stated, "to exercise power in a restrained, predictable manner that disproves the charge of hegemonism."²²

Transformational engagement strategies towards states like Cuba should also emphasize soft power. Whereas hard power is exercised through inducements and threats of the economic and military aspects of a nation's power, soft power leverages the intangible advantages of the United States – those things about the U.S. that other countries want to emulate. These intangibles include U.S. culture and personal freedoms, upward mobility, and the values of democracy. These things are much less dependent upon the influence or control of government than they are on the travel of private individuals into and out of the U.S. U.S. business and corporations that trade in other countries and employ their citizens are great soft power assets. Furthermore, so much of the U.S. culture is now readily accessible as a result of the explosion of

information technology. As German journalist Josef Joffe claimed, America's soft power "looms even larger than its economic and military assets. U.S. culture, low-brow or high, radiates outward with an intensity last seen in the days of the Roman Empire – but with a novel twist. Rome's and Soviet Russia's cultural sway stopped exactly at their military border. America's soft power, though, rules over an empire on which the sun never sets."²³ While it is open for debate how much actual realignment of another country's policies towards the U.S. is affected by soft power, exposure to this relatively benign influence is rarely harmful to U.S. objectives.

More Effort/A More Vital National Interest

Internally, states begin failing and ultimately fail for a myriad of reasons. As Rotberg observes, "A central state fails or nears failure because ethnic, racial, ideological, or regional divisions result in the breakdown of central authority and the emergence of widespread violence."²⁴ Often, these ethnic/racial divisions are manifested in ruling government patronage along these lines. As the leadership becomes richer from the sale of the nation's natural resources or by other means and as this wealth is not passed along to the population in some visible and satisfactory form, the gulf between the "have's" and "have not's" widens. Engaging a failing state, as mentioned earlier in this SRP, takes more effort and treasure than engagement in a developing state. This is because a failing state has greater needs both in terms of the government's legitimacy and general decline of its institutions. Additionally, active violence will likely be involved in engagement with a failing state due to alienated opposition groups or government sponsored violence against its opponents. Consulting the list of common causal factors for failed states, strategists must note linkages

between each factor in a thorough analysis. For example, assume the integrity of the government security forces has been compromised in some way. If these forces turn against the government, where will their next allegiance be? If the security force's allegiance is to an ethnic, religious, or tribal leader, what is that leader's relationship with the government in power? Or is this leader currently in the government? Is some portion of the military being used to gain advantage against a competing group or just to safeguard its own group? Does the leader who controls that portion of the military have business interests or a stake in foreign aid in the country? Ignorance of these complex factors may lead an intervening party to make poor strategic decisions that might include forming alliances, coalitions or partnerships with the wrong individuals or entities thereby jeopardizing objectives of the engagement.

States seeking to engage failed or failing states must focus on the following critical activities, (1) Dismantling instruments of violence, (2) removing incentives for violence and (3) creating security to enable economic recovery.²⁵ The umbrella of security is imperative for a failing or failed state to begin its climb towards recovery. This security then leads to public confidence, the establishment of a viable and legitimate government, economic development, employment of the population, and eventual overall recovery of the country. In order to achieve such an outcome, the approach employed by the intervening state or entity must be completely integrated. This involves the "whole of government" approach discussed earlier; it must involve all U.S. agencies and other entities that share their information and learning so government leadership can develop and execute an integrated strategy. Furthermore, there must be buy - in from the population that the engagement strategy will work to the

benefit of their children's future. The *information* component of DIME is vital for managing the expectations of the people regarding the rapidity and scope of change.

To effect a recovery, the right people must be "stake holders" in the process and responsible for the results. Failure to craft an integrated strategy and to identify all of the significant players and their spheres of influence may very well lead to engaging with people who contributed to or even caused the state's failure. By the same token, it may be necessary to include people who were part of the problem in order to arrive at a suitable solution – at least in the short term.

Arguably, one of the most important things to consider is whether or not to try to rebuild existing institutions that did not work in the first place and that might even have been a major catalyst for the failure – or to start over building new societal structures and institutions suited to contemporary and future requirements. Examples might include a traditional justice and court system that was based on religious principles, or an executive branch that includes mandatory representation from competing parties, or a military subordinate to civilian control not a military head of state. Perhaps it is best that the armed forces be integrated and organized across the spectrum of regional and ethnic concerns or even segregated in some cases to prevent ethnic or religious fissures. The polity, in whatever form, must be culturally acceptable to the people. But a further critical challenge is ensuring that it is acceptable to the aiding state and the rest of the world.

Nigeria is listed as number 18 on the *Failed State Index*.²⁶ It has a functioning government and military, but its petroleum based economy is fraught with corruption and mismanagement. Also, Chinese labor in the Nigerian oil industry has in some

cases displaced indigenous labor, increasing the number of disaffected persons who may very well turn to violence to protest against the government (potential downward spiral) or simply to survive. Additionally, the country continues to struggle with ethnic and religious tensions caused by the 250 ethnic groups represented within the country.²⁷ As the fifth largest supplier of U.S. crude oil, it could be argued that it is important for the U.S. to ensure the stability of the Nigerian government in order to, maintain the flow of oil to the U.S. – and the larger global economy – and to check the expanding Chinese influence in the region.²⁸ All of these requirements taken together warrant a robust U.S. engagement strategy in the region. Launched early and proactively, engagement to assist Nigeria would not be overly resource - intensive. Executed prudently, engagement would not endanger U.S. government personnel. During the early stages of such a comprehensive engagement strategy, critical cultural information about Nigeria should inform policy and strategy associated with the *information* component of the strategy. Such information is essential for shaping perceptions and understanding of the U.S. strategy amongst U.S. and Nigerian populations as well as the larger global community. A successful information campaign would prove particularly important if a more substantial and more risky commitment was required in the future. The diplomatic component of this strategy will be critical because Nigeria, as arguably the most powerful state in Africa, may not view the situation as the U.S. does.

Extreme Effort/Questionable or No National Interest

Arguably, internal violence that the government is unable or unwilling to control is the sine quo non of a failed state or collapsed state. A state maintains some degree of

authority as long as the government maintains a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. However, once paramilitary forces, ethnic militias, warlord armies and other sub-governmental entities form and successfully challenge state authority and monopoly on violence, the state's control over its people and territory will rapidly erode. Typically dissenting groups seek to eliminate all semblance of government control and take unto themselves the responsibilities and power of a legitimate government such as taxation, resource allocation, and conscription.²⁹ Such usurping efforts are frequently directed along ethnic or sectarian lines. Increasingly, this type of sub-national violence against a sitting government deliberately targets infrastructure as well as the population. This further weakens the state as people who provide goods and services are either killed or displaced and the infrastructure is destroyed or atrophies from neglect and lack of use.

The continuum from a failing to failed to collapsed state is usually protracted, so another effect of long - term violence manifests itself when most of the combatants are young males. Because they are dying in combat or simply not around women, the nation's birth rate declines and the viability of its family units dissipates. Taken to its extreme conclusion, the interconnected society necessary for the functioning of the state eventually disintegrates and the government disappears.

If a state is considered to be failed or collapsed, because of the associated paucity of security and the concomitant violence, the U.S. needs to justify its involvement with such states as a vital national interest. Strictly altruistic motives may not suffice. The inclination to preserve human life and to prevent human suffering especially, creates an emotional paradox in a non - affected country's psyche. On the

one hand, pictures on the nightly news of people starving as a result of a famine are hard to ignore, but on the other hand it is often equally difficult to link intervention in such a situation to a clear national interest. Nevertheless, such images often set off clarion calls for intervention in any form, simply in order to relieve the suffering. The same holds true for natural disasters. Events such as famine or natural disasters are relatively easy to become involved in; and, as long as the famine is not caused by the government, such relief operations are relatively easy to execute and to terminate. However, if the famine is caused by actions or policies of the government – or something even more sinister like genocide – the difficulty of intervention increases exponentially. In many cases, this is true because in order to change the conditions that caused the crisis in the first place, regime change is likely the only option. In the case of genocide, the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide specifically addresses the issue of intervention. Article VIII declares, “Any contracting Party may call upon the competent organs of the United Nations to take such action under the Charter of the United Nations as they consider appropriate for the prevention and suppression of acts of genocide or any of the other acts enumerated in article III.”³⁰ This language compels signatories to act when the UN terms an event as a genocide. However, this requirement has directly resulted in the UN not using that language in the recent cases of Rwanda and Sudan.

An emerging concept within the international community is the “Responsibility to Protect”. This concept, initially advanced by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, attempts to balance the UN Charter’s principles of the sovereignty of individual states and non-interference in those states with statements

designed to foster international cooperation and promote and encourage respect for human rights.³¹ The language specifically states that upon joining the UN, nations do not surrender their sovereignty, but there is a necessary reformulation from “sovereignty as control to sovereignty as responsibility in both internal and external duties.”³²

However, the Commission also proclaimed that the first responsibility of the state is the protection of its citizens; so if it is unwilling or unable to do so, then the responsibility shifts to the international community. However, smaller and weaker nations oppose this proposition because they fear it will be used as a pretext to intervene in their affairs or to overthrow their governments.³³

As cold as it sounds to liberal western ears, the most successful nations today were borne out of war and strife. In these states, events impelled people to resolve issues in ways that led to solutions suitable to all parties involved and ultimately strengthened the fabric of the emerging or young nation. As pointedly stated by Hammond and Shaw: “To speak glibly of “nation building” or mistake the *de jure* diplomatic courtesy and UN membership of unviable regimes for *de facto* sovereignty is to sustain empire’s moribund and “stinking” remnants³⁴...It is also an arrogant denial to others of the opportunity afforded the West for building viable social, political and economic systems suited to local circumstances. To proclaim that force of arms has no role in such “development” is a rejection of our past, much of the world’s present and our collective future, regrettable though that may be.”³⁵ So we must question whether nations perceived as failing or failed should be assisted by those who perceive an obligation to assist them. Perhaps intervention merely short - circuits the sometimes violent learning process of state development.

As tragic as the issue of Darfur is for the tens of thousands of people being displaced, exploited, and savaged by the militias, there is arguably no U.S. national interest in this devastating affair – or at least none that has yet been adequately articulated. And although Sudan borders the west coast of the Red Sea, a vital trade route for maritime commerce, as long as that route is not directly threatened, there is insufficient reason for the U.S. to intervene.

Another example is Somalia. Somalia is currently without a government following the resignation of the Transitional Federal Government and the withdrawal of the Ethiopian army.³⁶ Somalia's location on the Horn of Africa astride the critical trade routes along Africa's east coast as well as the approaches to the Gulf of Aden make it vital geographically for the transportation of oil from the Middle East to Europe and the U.S. The recent increase in incidents of piracy originating from Somalia has brought that nation back into the realm of a U.S. national interest and a global concern. Because there is no existing polity in Somalia, if the piracy issue gets to a point that it needs to be acted upon, the diplomatic and economic elements of national power will be irrelevant. However, the informational element of a kinetic response is largely satisfied by the effects that piracy is having on solidifying global opinion in favor of action to restore free and secure maritime transportation in the region. Only a military response can neutralize the base camps from which the pirates operate and receive support. Following military action, the information and diplomatic elements could be engaged to inform responsible parties that piracy and lawlessness will not be tolerated by the U.S. or the broader world community.

This Somalia example is in contrast to the option that the U.S. exercised following the overthrow of the Taliban and expulsion of Al Qaeda from Afghanistan – that being occupation and building infrastructure and the institutions of a representative government. A case could be made that there was nothing resembling infrastructure in Afghanistan to rebuild following the initial U.S. incursion thereby relieving the U.S. of that responsibility. A democratic Afghanistan may be unattainable. Following the overthrow, had the U.S. departed and kept an over watch from neighboring countries, it might have been easier to let the Afghans sort it out themselves with the help and advice of Pakistan.

UN Charter: Criteria for Membership

In the cases of both Sudan and Somalia, some would argue that if a recognized state is not performing to globally accepted standards of good governance and protection of the human rights of its people, it should no longer be considered a sovereign state. Jeffrey Herbst posits that some process of ‘decertification’ could be developed that would publicly remove the illusion that a government is still in complete control of its territory or providing sufficiently for its people. This process would also negate the usual privileges afforded to a sovereign nation either by the United Nations as a world organization or the individual countries comprising the General Assembly. This may serve as a wake - up call to that country’s government, which might then undertake efforts to find new leaders who can build and sustain a viable nation.³⁷ While this may be effective in a bilateral or even a regional setting, developing a new world-wide framework of nationhood and to getting all or most of the 192 recognized nations to ratify it would most likely be an insurmountable challenge.

However, the U.N. Charter does provide a framework for ‘decertification.’ To gain admission to the U.N., nations are certified. If these later fail to meet certification standards, they are decertified and expelled from the U.N. Article 5 states that any member “against which preventive or enforcement action has been taken by the Security Council may be suspended from the exercise of the rights and privileges of membership by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council.” Article 6 further states that “A member of the United Nations that has persistently violated the Principles contained in the present Charter may be expelled from the Organization by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council”.³⁸ Member nations should consider amending the U.N. Charter to provide that expelled nations have lost their sovereignty. Then in such cases interventions in these expelled nations would no longer raise issues of sovereignty.

Regardless of the causes states do fail and collapse. And these failures have many ramifications, particularly for neighboring states. If the world writ large – or an individual state – chooses not to intervene in a failing, failed or collapsed state, what are the fiduciary responsibilities – if any – that the world assumes? Using the premise that states fail within their own borders, should the effort be made to prevent – or control the spread of the failure – to neighboring states? One solution might be to fulfill the Responsibility to Protect in a neighboring state. This could potentially make the world community less reluctant to fulfill their humanitarian responsibilities. Furthermore, the willing engagement of many nations would mitigate a major U.S. commitment following the initial intervention. While not a perfect solution, and one that would tend to favor those closest to the border areas, the effort to protect and provide for as many people

as possible without trying to save a failed polity would constitute an acknowledgement that a state is unsalvageable in its current form and that while the strong will do what they will do, the weak need not suffer what they must.³⁹

When a country has failed or collapsed, the world should consider withdrawing recognition of that nation as a sovereign entity. As the causes for failure become clearer, further consideration should be given to recognizing new governmental entities that arise within the borders of the failed state. If that new polity addresses – and even solves – the causal issues of the previous failure and provides an acceptable level of governance and security for its inhabitants, recognition by the world community – and all the benefits it brings – could be leveraged to compel that entity to continue to grow and govern in a manner that facilitates and improves the conditions of its people. An example of this might be the self-declared independent Somaliland in the northwest of the recognized borders of Somalia. Although fundamentally Islamist in its leaning, it has made efforts at to democratize, to develop fundamental institutions, and to build other capabilities in its more than ten year quest for diplomatic recognition.⁴⁰

Conclusion

The U.S. must stay engaged in the world in order to retain its superpower status. The conundrum is that many nations which the U.S. and the world writ large rely upon for key natural resources – and through which these resources move – are failing or failed states. Furthermore, these states become susceptible to exploitation by groups intent on doing harm to the U.S. and its allies.

The U.S. must be willing and able to engage in these states. Since power is a zero sum game, the question becomes whether or not to engage a given state or region – and if

so, to what extent. It is certainly much cheaper in blood and treasure to engage early in a weak or developing state than it is to become involved in one that is failing or has indeed collapsed. However, if the U.S. must become involved in a state that has gone so far down the path towards failure that the security of the U.S. becomes an issue, the involvement must be linked to a national interest worthy of the expenditure of the nation's blood and treasure. Therefore, the U.S. needs to adopt more of a *realpolitik* basis for its foreign policy. As Nye tells us, "In a way foreign policy was easier when it dealt with interests rather than emotions and morals."⁴¹

Endnotes

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² Ibid.

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⁴ Robert I. Rotberg, ed., *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 6 – 7.

⁵ *ibid*, 9.

⁶ Marla C. Haims and others, "Breaking the Failed – State Cycle", (Santa Monica, Ca: RAND Corporation, 2008), xi.

⁷ *Ibid*, xii.

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⁹ Christopher Clapham, "The Global – Local Politics of State Decay," in, *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 80-81.

¹⁰ Grant T. Hammond and Bryant P. Shaw, "Conflict, the Rise of Nations, and the Decay of States: The Transformation of the International System", <http://www.lib.unb.ca/Texts/JCS/SPR95/hammond.pdf>, 16.

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²² Joseph S. Nye Jr, *The Paradox of American Power*, (New York, N.Y: Oxford University Press, 2002), 25.

²³ Joseph S. Nye Jr., 10,11.

²⁴ Nicolas van de Walle, "The Economic Correlates of State Failure: Taxes, Foreign Aid and Policies," in *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 90.

²⁵ Ibid.

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²⁷ Central Intelligence Agency World Fact Book - Nigeria, [https:// www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html), (accessed February 7, 2009).

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³⁹ *The Complete Writings of Thucydides*, The Unabridged Crawley Translation, (New York: Random House. n.d.), 331. The quote on page 26 of my text is an adjustment for effect of a passage from the Athenians in the Melian Dialogue. The actual quote reads; "...since you know as well as we do that right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they do, the weak suffer what they must."

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